Australian Government Statistical Forum

Summary Record

Tuesday 7 May 2013, ABS House, Canberra

Theme: **Developments in Spatial Statistics**

Chair	Mr Brian Pink, Australian Statistician.
Members	Mr Jonathan Palmer, Mr Trevor Sutton, Mr Peter Harper, Mr Ian Ewing, Mr Lewis Conn (ABS), Dr Judy Schneider (FaHCSIA), Ms Teresa Dickinson (AIHW), Mr Gary Moore (DHS), Mr Warwick McDonald (BoM), Ms Janice Wykes (DIAC), Ms Julia Neville (ATO), Mr Marc Vickers (AGIMO), Ms Milly Lubulwa (ABARES), Ms Therese Thompson (ABARES, proxy for Mr Walter Shafron), Mr Wayne Calder (BREE, proxy for Professor Quentin Grafton), Mr Mike Maslen (DSEWPaC, proxy for Dr Kathryn Collins), Mr John Weaver (OSP, proxy for Ms Helen Owens), Ms Pia Waugh (AGIMO, proxy for Mr John Sheridan), Mr Geoff Frost (BITRE, proxy for Dr Gary Dolman), Mr Craig Winfield (DoHA, proxy for Mr David Dennis), Mr Shon Fletcher (DIICCSRTE, proxy for Mr Richard Snabel), Mr Anthony Hunter (DEEWR, proxy for Dr Scott Matheson).
Apologies	Ms Helen Owens (OSP), Dr Scott Matheson (DEEWR), Dr Gary Dolman (BITRE), Dr Tom Karmel (NCVER), Professor Quentin Grafton (BREE), Dr Kathryn Collins (DSEWPaC), Mr David Dennis (DoHA), Mr Stephen Kelly (DHS), Mr Richard Snabel (DIICCSRTE), Ms Katy Balmaks (DHS), Mr Walter Shafron (ABARES), Mr Geoffrey Armitage (BREE).
Presenters/ Observers/ Minutes	Mr John Weaver (OSP), Dr Richard Mount (BoM), Mr Mark Jackson (ATO), Mr Mano Georgopoulos (ABR) ABS – Mr Graeme Brown, Mr Alister Nairn, Mr Bill Allen, Ms Marie Apostolou, Ms Carolyn Verey, Dr Caroline Blink.

Agenda Item 1 (a) - Welcome

1.1   Mr Trevor Sutton opened the meeting on behalf of the Australian Statistician and noted Mr Brian Pink apologised for being delayed. Note while the agenda was rearranged on the day, for ease of understanding the minutes reflect the original order.

Agenda Item 1 (b) – Statistician's Update

1.2   Mr Brian Pink noted the ABS has now completed the second and third releases of Census data and was now strongly focused on the delivery of the 2016 Census. One highlight from the 2011 Census releases was the improvement of analytical tools provided for engaging with Census data including Survey TableBuilder, which is also being used for data releases for other ABS social surveys.

1.3   Mr Pink commented on the recent release of the *2013 List of Essential Statistical Assets for Australia* and expressed his appreciation for the support and work put into this release by other agencies prior to its release. The next phase will look at the quality of the underlying data that we draw on to produce the statistical assets on the list and this process will again require input from other organisations. The ABS will also be looking at the essential statistical infrastructure that supports those statistics (e.g., the Australian Business Register which uses the Geocoded-National Address File) and the frameworks that underpin these assets. The ABS will again be consulting widely to develop the list of Essential Statistical Infrastructure, including with AGSF members, and while this will not be as large an undertaking it is just as critical.

1.4   Mr Pink noted the positive feedback received regarding the recent NatStats 2013 conference, with most agreeing the quality of the speakers was high and the topics discussed were extremely relevant. The highlight for many was Dan Gregory, who had some interesting points to raise about how we work and what we do, and how we can get the Australian public to understand the value of statistics.

1.5   Mr Pink noted that most agencies find themselves in tight budget positions, which was what had led the ABS to make the difficult decision to cancel the 2013 collection of the Work, Life and Families Survey and reduce the frequency of the Survey of Tourist Accommodation from quarterly to annually. Mr Pink acknowledged the high volume of communication he had received from disappointed users and added he had no other choice as current ABS resources did not support the planned work program.

1.6   Mr Pink spoke of the transformation program being undertaken by the ABS to rebuild ageing technical systems and how the ABS is seeking a capital injection from the Government. He said the need for redevelopment was extremely high as the fragility of the old systems presents a real risk that something could go wrong.

1.7   Mr Pink stated the ABS's attention was now firmly turned to the 2016 Census with the goal to create and produce a predominantly digital Census, aiming for 70% online completion. This is an important step, as it means the 2021 Census will not be constrained by what can fit on a paper form. A digital Census will make it possible to regionalise and tailor questions to specific areas or population groups (e.g., disability, journey to work) identified by screening questions. Mr Pink noted that while there will

not be an infinite number of questions which could be asked, the benefit will be asking a range of questions of all the people in Australia with that specific characteristic.

1.8   Mr Pink closed by stating that 2013 was the International Year of Statistics and asked members to pass along any events they were running or any ideas they had about encouraging the recognition of the importance of statistics to our society.

1.9   Members asked about the pilot process for the Essential Statistical Assets for Australia (ESA) quality assessment phase. Mr Pink said the ABS would be talking to a small number of agencies regarding participating in the pilot which would then form the basis for a quality assessment across the 2013 ESA list. The aim was to get to a stage where data custodians could perform a self-assessment with ABS support using a template based on the ABS's data quality framework.

Agenda Item 2 – Spatial Data Framework

2.1   Mr John Weaver (Office of Spatial Policy (OSP)) provided information about their work with the Spatial Information Council (ANZLIC) to develop consistent foundation spatial data that all government agencies would be able to access and use as the basis for their own data. This would ensure consistent and coherent spatial information is used across Australia.

2.2   To this end, OSP and ANZLIC have developed the *ANZ Foundation Spatial Data Framework* which endeavours to adopt and adapt existing work to build an aspirational model by November 2013 for the ten spatial data themes identified by consultation. The ten spatial data themes identified are: geocoded addressing, administrative boundaries, positioning, place names, land parcel and property, imagery, transport, water, elevation and depth, and land cover. The aim is to share the data under open content licences and improve quality as an iterative process. For more information about this framework, see the full report (http://spatial.gov.au/system/files/public/resources/anzlic/ANZ_FoundationSpatialDataFramework_%28FinalWeb%29.pdf)

2.3   Members asked about the release schedule for the datasets. Mr Weaver commented the first release would include administrative boundaries and transport and OSP is aiming to release these by the end of the year. Geocoded addressing is running on a parallel track and an Inter-Departmental Committee has been formed to gain a government-wide license from PSMA. However, progress on this theme is dependent on a review of the process. This year, OSP will be setting up working groups for all ten data themes in order to identify what datasets and models currently exist and what the aspirational model for each should be.

2.4   Members asked how OSP would handle the problem of changing boundaries for time series continuity. Mr Weaver explained OSP is structuring the data so that even if boundaries change, older boundary datasets will not be removed, their status will be updated to "retired" so it will still be possible to use the older dataset to maintain time series.

Agenda Item 3 – Spatially-enabled Ecosystem Accounting: Theory to Practice

3.1   Dr Richard Mount (BoM) outlined the theoretical underpinnings of ecosystem accounting and noted that its practical application is still a work in progress as there is

the need for an improved estimate of Australia's natural capital. The UN's System of Environmental-Economic Accounting (SEEA) represents the current state of practice and is an experimental framework for ecosystem accounting. Defining an ecosystem is a challenge not only in terms of how to delimit the unit of measurement (e.g. natural versus arbitrary boundaries), but also in terms of measuring the flows within and between units of measurement as ecosystems are not isolated or discrete entities.

3.2   In practice, ecosystem accounting is looking for the "sweet spots" which match the input data to the required outputs while striving to meet the accounting conceptual model and applying best-practice geospatial methods. This means that focusing on ecosystems is not always useful and there is a need to step back to something more practical, such as ecosystem services and ecosystem assets.

3.3   Members asked about the key areas where the SEEA framework can be taken forward. Dr Mount identified that engagement with the scientific and research community would help determine what is needed, and in addition the conceptual model could be extended from the land into the sea. Dr Mount also noted there is a need to understand the carbon cycle, water and biodiversity accounts as these are fundamental. A way of measuring depreciation in the value of natural resources, such as waste and degradation, is also needed.

Agenda Item 4 – Connecting People with Place: A Statistical Spatial Framework

4.1   Mr Graeme Brown (ABS) highlighted the need in a tough budget climate of being able to better target spending on regional development and that this targeting was easier when there were stronger links between spatial and statistical data, particularly with location based socio-economic data. Mr Brown noted the goal of the Statistical Spatial Framework (SSF) is to maximise the use of spatial information for government and decision makers and it enables this by providing a consistent and integrated method for linking statistical and spatial information.

4.2   Mr Brown noted the ABS had been in discussions with the United Nations Statistical Commission about adopting the SSF internationally and their response had been positive. The ABS would be taking a lead role in the international working group being formed to progress this work.
4.3   Mr Pink commented about the importance of this initiative both nationally and internationally for the statistical and spatial communities. Mr Brown indicated the ABS is happy to engage in forums or seminars and other agencies wanting to hear more about this work should contact Mr Brown (graeme.brown@abs.gov.au or geography@abs.gov.au).

Agenda Item 5 – Spatially Enabling Data in the ABR

5.1   Mr Mark Jackson (ATO) outlined the purpose and history of the Australian Business Register (ABR) which contains a list of all the regulated entities within Australia and allows the ATO and other organisations to identify who is in business in Australia. Mr Jackson noted the goal is to encourage governments to use the information collected in the ABR to reduce the respondent burden placed on businesses.

5.2   Mr Jackson highlighted spatial improvements to the ABR, which would be available from November 2013. These included the ability to use longitudinal information from the ABR allowing government organisations to track changes over time, as well as collecting information on associates and branches, geocoding addresses and providing access to spatially enabled data through online tools.

5.3   Members noted the criticality of the data assets held in the ABR and asked whether there were any confidentiality issues. Mr Jackson noted the ABR is quite careful about how the information is shared. Previously all access to the ABR was handled through bilateral Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs). However, the administrative burden of managing the proliferation of agreements became unmanageable. As such, the ABR has moved to a Terms and Conditions approach which states that information will only be used for legitimate purposes and stored confidentially and securely. A designated officer from each agency has the responsibility to determine the legitimate use of the data and compliance is monitored through an audit program.

5.4   Mr Pink invited Mr Jackson to present to AGSF in 2014 to showcase the ABR spatial developments and online deliverables. (Action item 1).

Agenda Item 6 – Around the Table: Statistical Matters of Significance

6.1   Mr Pink invited members to share statistical updates:

- Ms Pia Waugh (AGIMO) spoke about open government and plans for moving data.gov.au to CKAN, an open data platform. Ms Waugh noted that this new platform would make it easier for users to publish, manage and leverage government datasets. Ms Waugh mentioned that the migration process had highlighted some issues with the existing site and this had prompted the introduction of a policy limiting the type of data publishable to data.gov.au to tabular files or links to data web services.

- Mr Geoff Frost (BITRE) noted that in July, BITRE would be releasing the Brisbane report on the community along with comparative reports for Sydney and Melbourne, as well as the *State of Australian Cities 2013* report. Mr Frost spoke about work that had been done using Census data to look at spatial patterns from regional cities and how they have changed over time and what might be the drivers of this change.

- Ms Teresa Dickinson (AIHW) noted that AIHW will be undertaking the next *Global Burden of Disease* study in Australia and would be looking for involvement from other agencies.

- Mr Marc Vickers (AGIMO) spoke about AGIMO's recent *Big Data Strategy – Issues Paper* and noted that they had received over 50 submissions and a finalised summary of the feedback was on their blog (http://agimo.gov.au/2013/04/18/response-to-big-data-strategy-issues-paper/). The next step for AGIMO is to finalise the strategy and clarify what support would be provided to agencies looking to make use of big data.

- Mr Shon Fletcher (DIICCSRTE) provided an update on the whole-of-government firm level data plan being managed by DIICCSRTE, noting that Cabinet had agreed to the plan in November 2012 and DIICCSRTE were now working with

the ABS on plans to improve firm level data. Mr Fletcher stated they have Secretaries Board agreement to the Terms of Reference for a cross-government Steering Committee, which will oversee the implementation of the plan. The first meeting of the Steering Committee will be held in June 2013.

- Ms Janice Wykes (DIAC) noted that DIAC was looking to spatially enable the migrant data they hold.

- Dr Judy Schneider (FaHCSIA) noted that FaHCSIA are looking at how they collect and use their data so they can make greater use of their data holdings.

- Mr Mike Maslen (SEWPaC) said SEWPaC's first report on sustainability indicators would be released soon.

- Mr Warwick McDonald (BoM) spoke about a proposal BoM had put through for the science panel to progress Environmental-Economic Accounting. He also mentioned that BoM were working with other agencies to expose their environmental data assets through an open standards based web platform on the BoM website.

Agenda Item 7 – Other Business

7.1   Mr Pink called for any other business.

7.2   Ms Pia Waugh (AGIMO) noted the upcoming GovHack event, which is a national developer event running on 31 May and 1 June with the ABS and 12 other Commonwealth government agencies as well as five State and Territory agencies involved in running and sponsoring the event.

7.3   Mr Pink noted the next meeting would be held on 30 October 2013. The suggested theme for this meeting is Statistical Data Integration. Any members with a case study they would like to share can contact Marie Apostolou (marie.apostolou@abs.gov.au). (Action item 2).

Meeting close

Action Items

Action Item	Description	Responsibility	Time-frame	Minute reference
1	Mr Jackson to be invited to provide AGSF members with an update on ABR spatial and online developments in 2014.	AGSF secretariat	2014	Para 5.4
2	Members to contact Marie Apostolou (marie.apostolou@abs.gov.au) with case studies on Statistical Data Integration for the next meeting.	AGSF members	1 September 2013	Para 7.3